

Imagine The Worst...

One premise of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) is that negative emotions stem from cognitive distortions or biases.

When cognitive distortions cause our negative feelings to spiral out of control, we are less capable of thinking rationally and solving problems.

For example, we may be prone to:

- Over-generalizing (“*This person was rude, therefore everybody here must be rude.*”)
- Black-or-white thinking (“*If I can’t do this right, I can’t do anything right.*”) or
- Discounting the positive (“*She was very understanding, that must have been a one-off.*”)

REBT aims to help individuals better tolerate life’s difficulties by implementing techniques that facilitate more objective, realistic thinking.

This worksheet introduces two REBT techniques that can help clients put seemingly catastrophic fears into perspective:

- *Imagine The Worst*, and
- *Blown Out of All Proportion*

Imagine The Worst

Imagine The Worst is a simple REBT intervention that encourages clients to face their fears and realize that they are often unfounded or irrational.

This intervention may initially cause some increase in anxiety - but in the longer-term, it can alleviate them by helping clients think objectively about their fears.

1. Instruct the client to imagine the worst-case scenario surrounding the feared event. For example, asking someone on a date only to be rejected. Encourage them to immerse themselves in the scenario - *How would they feel? What other details can they describe?*
2. Pose the following questions if you feel they are helpful:
 - o *In reality, what do you feel is the likelihood of this scenario actually taking place? What are the chances of that, considering all the facts?*
 - o *When you imagine yourself in this scenario, how awful do you truly feel in the moment? How badly do you believe you'll feel about it the next day? How about a week from the event occurring? Will it matter in a month?*
 - o *Now that this scenario is playing out, what are some things you could do to make it less awful? What can you control? What could you do?*

Blown Out of All Proportion

Blown Out of All Proportion builds on *Imagine The Worst* by using humor and visualization to transform perceived 'worst-case' scenarios into lighter, more manageable mental images.

1. Instruct the client to envision whatever they are currently in fear of - this could be an internal (anxiety, stress, self-criticism) or external fear (judgment, loss, rejection).
2. Ask them to blow it out of all proportion in their imaginations until it is ridiculous and laughable. That is, until it's impossible not to be entertained by the idea.
3. Laughing at our fears can help us put them in perspective and regain a sense of control of them.

For Example:

The client is overly distressed about presenting a proposal to the executive team - they are worried they will embarrass themselves.

Instruct them to imagine failing spectacularly, stumbling on every word before their pants drop and shock the whole room.

Visualize the executive board calling the police in the ensuing chaos, before they are carted away to face an indecency charge. Picture themselves in court, trying to explain that it was all a mistake, while the media clamor outside the courtroom to get a photo for the news. Imagine one of the executives being interviewed, discussing his need to take time off work from the shock.

What might the media headlines read? What TV shows would be interrupted for a breaking broadcast? Would your client's presentation be featured in "Worst Ever" Halls of Fame?